2

Anatta Lakkhaṇa Sutta

The Discourse on the Non-self Characteristic | **S 22.59** ≈ **Mv 1.6.38-47** (V 1:13 f)
Pañca Sutta The Discourse on the Five
Theme: The 3 characteristics, the 5 aggregates, and non-self
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1 Sutta highlights

1.1 SUTTA SEQUENCE. This is said to be the second discourse delivered by the Buddha to the 5 monks (the Buddha's first disciples) who were still learners (*sekha*), that is, any of the 7 kinds of saints[1]. At the end of the discourse, however, they became arhats.[2] It should be noted that the first three suttas— **the Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta** (S 56.11),[3] **the Anatta Lakkhaṇa Sutta** (S 22.59) and **the Āditta Pariyāya Sutta** (S 35.28)—are not only closely related but flow coherently in that sequence.

The first discourse is a statement of the Buddha's discovery of "suffering and its ending," and what is merely mentioned—"in short, the 5 aggregates of clinging[4] are suffering" [§5]—is elaborated in the second discourse, the Anatta Lakkhaṇa Sutta (S 22.59), where the 5 aggregates are given in detail. In the third discourse, **the Āditta Pariyāya Sutta** (S 35.28),[5] the focus shifts to the "all," that is, the 6 sense-bases, a teaching specifically given in **the Sabba Sutta** (S 35.23).[6]

1.2 SUTTA BACKGROUND. The Saṁyutta Commentary says that the Anatta Lakkhaṇa Sutta was delivered on the fifth day of the following fortnight after the teaching of the First Discourse (S 56.11), on the full-moon day of Āsāḷha (June-July). With the awakening of the 5 monks, the noble sangha is established and the Dispensation begins: Buddhism is born.

The Sutta is also called **the Pañca Sutta** (the Discourse on the Five) for two reasons: it teaches about the 5 aggregates, and secondly, the audience comprises the 5 monks. The main teachings of **the Anatta Lakkhaṇa Sutta** (S 22.59) and of **the Assaji Sutta** (S 22.88) are practically identical, except that in the former the syntax is in the plural (to the 5 monks), while in the latter it is singular (to Assaji).[7]

1.3 SUTTA SIGNIFICANCE

1.3.1 The first 5 monks

1.3.1.1 **The Vinaya** records the first awakening—the attaining of streamwinning—of each of the 5 monks (Koṇḍañña, Vappa, Bhaddiya, Mahā,nāma, and Assajī). Kondañña is the first to attain streamwinning,[8] and upon his request is admitted by the Buddha by the "Come, bhikshu" (*ehi,bhikkhu*) formula.[9] Then, Vappa and Bhaddiya become streamwinners, while the other 3 monks go on almsround.[10] Finally, it is Mahā,nāma and Assajī who become streamwinners, while the other two monks go on almsround.[11] They are all admitted as renunciants with the same "Come, bhikshu" formula.

1.3.1.2 The Commentaries give us more details. It is well known that at the end of the exposition of the Dhamma,cakka Pavattana Sutta (S 56.11), Koṇḍañña awakens as a streamwinner. Then, the Buddha and the 5 monks enter into the rains-retreat that very day itself, a day famously known as Āsāḷha Pūjā.[12]

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[1] That is, streamwinner-to-be, streamwinner-become, once-returner-to-be, once-returner-become, non-returner-to-be, non-returner-become, and arhat-to-be. See **Aṭṭha Puggala S 2** (A 8.60), SD 15.10a(2).

[2] V 1:14; S 3:66; cf M 3:19.

[3] See SD 1.1.

[4] *Pañc'upadāna-k,khandha,* namely, form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness (S 3:47 Vbh 1).

[5] See SD 1.3.

[6] See SD 7.1.

[7] For the significance of this in terms of the origins of Anatta Lakkhana S (S 22.59), see **Assaji S** (S 22.88) @ SD 42.8 (2.3).

[8] Mv 1.6.29 (V 1:11,32) & Mv 1.6.32 (V 1:12); also in **Dhanma,cakka Pavattana S** (S 56.11,20), SD 1.1.

[9] Mv 1.6.32 (V 1:12,28); also in **Dhanma,cakka Pavattana S** (S 56.11,20), SD 1.1.

[10] Mv 1.6.33-34 (V 1:12,28-13,2).

[11] Mv 1.6.35-37 (V 1:13,6-17).

[12] On Āsāḷha Pūjā, see SD 1.1 (1.2).

1.3.1.3 The Commentaries, however, say that the remaining 4 monks, each attain streamwinning on a successive day after that: Vappa, on the following day, on the 1st day of the waning fortnight;[13] Bhaddiya, on the 2nd day; Mahānāma, on the 3rd day, and Assaji, on the 4th day (AA 1:147). All the 5 attained <u>arhathood</u> at the end of the teaching of the Anatta Lakkhaṇa Sutta (S 22.59),[14] on the 5th day of the waning fortnight (J 1:82).[15]

1.3.2 The oldest monk. The Anatta Lakkhaṇa Sutta closes with the 5 monks—Koṇḍañña,[16] Vappa, Bhaddiya, Mahānāma and Assaji—attaining arhathood [§11]. While it is true that Koṇḍañña is the first of the monks to attain streamwinning, all the 5 monks attain arhathood, the highest liberation, at the same time, that is, at the end of the exposition of the Anatta Lakkhaṇa Sutta.

Technically speaking, then, we cannot say that Koṇḍañña is the "foremost" (*agga*) of those monks who have seniority (*rattaññū*), that is, those who have lived the most days (literally, "nights," *ratta*). If we speak of <u>the noble sangha</u> (*ariya,saṅgha*), the first arhats (after the Buddha) would be the group of 5 monks, who are of equal seniority, since they awaken as arhats at the same time.

Hence, it is more likely that ***rattaññū*** here does not mean "seniority" in terms of ecclesiastical rank or number of rains that the monk has rightly observed. Rather it simply means "seniority" in the literal sense, that is, <u>the oldest of the monks</u>, which **Koṇḍañña** indeed is.[17] This interpretation also makes sense when we note that **Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī** is declared as the foremost of the nuns in terms of seniority (A 1:25,18), that is, she is literally, <u>the oldest of the nuns</u>, and one who has awakened as an arhat.[18]

2 Why there is no soul

The Anatta Lakkhaṇa Sutta gives <u>two arguments *against the notion of an abiding self*</u>. The first [§3-11] is that we are merely <u>the 5 aggregates</u>, and none of these aggregates can come under our control (*avasa,vattitā*). If anything is to be regarded as our self, we should be able to willfully control it, but this is not the case. We only have the delusion that we are in control, or desire to be in control, but in reality, we are blindly led on by our latent tendencies.[19]

The second argument against the self-notion [§12-16] is in connection with <u>the three characteristics</u>: impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self. Non-self is demonstrated on the basis of the other two characteristics, impermanence and suffering. A fuller analysis of this non-self doctrine is given in **the Cūḷa Saccaka Sutta** (M 35,11-21).

According to Buddhaghosa (MA 2:113 f), the Buddha proves the fact of non-self in three ways:

(1) by showing that something is not eternal (*anicca*);
(2) by showing that it is unsatisfactory (*dukkha*);
(3) by showing both.

In the Anatta Lakkhaṇa Sutta, the Buddha shows that the 5 aggregates of existence (*pañca-k,khandha*) — form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness—are *dukkha*; in **the Cha,chakka Sutta** (M 3:282) he shows that the eye, etc, are *anicca* (impermanent); in **the Arahantā Sutta** (S 3:82 f), he shows that the 5 aggregates are both:

Bhikshus, visual form is impermanent: whatever is impermanent is unsatisfactory; whatever is unsatisfactory is non-self. Whatever is non-self is not mine, I am not that, that is not my self.
                              (S 3:82 f; see Dh 277-79 = Tha 676-78, Pm 2:106 for simplified versions)

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[13] In the forenoon, J 1:92.
[14] S 22.59/3:68 @ SD 1.2; V 1:13 f.
[15] On <u>the admission of the 5 monks</u> as renunciants, see SD 45.16 (1.1).
[16] On <u>Koṇḍañña</u>, see **Naḷaka,pāna S** (M 68) @ SD 37.4 (1.2.2).
[17] For further details on <u>the 5 monks</u>, see SD 1.1 (1).
[18] There is no clear internal evidence to support the tradition that Gotamī is the first nun, although her admission has the most interesting history, considering the social status: see SD 45.16 (1.2).
[19] For a discussion on the will (incl free will), see **Atta,kārī S** (A 6.38), SD 10.10 Intro.

The Discourse on the Non-self Characteristic
S 22.59 ☐ V 1:13 f

1   [Thus have I heard.]
At one time the Blessed One was staying in the Deer Park at Isi,patana near Benares.
2   [Mv 1.6.38] Then, the Blessed One addressed the company of 5 monks:
"Bhikshus!"
"Bhante!" the monks replied. The Blessed One said:

Contra "eternal self": The 5 aggregates[20]
3   (1) "Bhikshus, **form**[21] is non-self.[22]
For, bhikshus, if form were self, this form would not bring about illness [affliction], and it would be possible to tell the form: 'Let my form be such. Let my form not be such.'[23]
4   But, bhikshus, because form is non-self, form brings about illness [affliction], and it is not possible to say of form: 'Let my form be such. Let my form not be such.' [Mv 1.6.39]
5   (2) Bhikshus, **feeling**[24] is non-self. **[67]**
For, bhikshus, if feeling were self, this feeling would not bring about illness [affliction], and it would be possible to tell the feeling: 'Let my feeling be such. Let my feeling not be such.'
6   But, bhikshus, because feeling is non-self, feeling brings about illness [affliction], and it is not possible to say of feeling: 'Let my feeling be such. Let my feeling not be such.' [Mv 1.6.40]
7   (3) Bhikshus, **perception**[25] is non-self.
For, bhikshus, if perception were self, this perception would not bring about illness [affliction], and it would be possible to tell the perception: 'Let my perception be such. Let my perception not be such.'
8   But, bhikshus, because perception is non-self, perception brings about illness [affliction], and it is not possible to say of perception: 'Let my perception be such. Let my perception not be such.'
9   (4) Bhikshus, **formations**[26] are non-self.
For, bhikshus, if formations were self, these formations would not bring about illness [affliction], and it would be possible to tell the formations: 'Let my formations be such. Let my formations not be such.'
10   But, bhikshus, because formations are non-self, formations lead to illness [affliction], and it is not possible to say of formations: 'Let my formations be such. Let my formations not be such.'
11   (5) Bhikshus, **consciousness**[27] is non-self. [Mv 1.6.41]
For, bhikshus, if consciousness were self, this consciousness would not bring about illness [affliction], and it would be possible to tell the consciousness: 'Let my consciousness be such. Let my consciousness not be such.'
But because consciousness is non-self, consciousness brings about illness [affliction], and it is not possible to say of consciousness: 'Let my consciousness be such. Let my consciousness not be such.'
[Mv 1.6.42]

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[20] On the 5 aggregates, see SD 17. On the 4 self-views (*attā'nudiṭṭhi*) leading to our identifying with any of these aggregates, see SD 2.16 (15).
[21] See **Rūpa,** SD 17.2a.
[22] The usage of "non-self" as an adj here may sound a bit awkward to some. It helps as we read it to recall its definition as "bereft or any permanent entity." See **Is there a soul?,** SD 2.16 esp (1.2) on the tr "non-self."
[23] This is the first argument against the self-notion, that is, the nature of the 5 aggregates are not subject to our control (*avasa,vattitā*), but they are all subject to illness [affliction], and as such cannot be our self. See Steve Collins, *Selfless Persons,* 1982:97-103 for the 3 arguments against the self or soul.
[24] See **Vedanā,** SD 17.3.
[25] See **Saññā**, SD 17.4.
[26] See **Saṅkhārā**, SD 17.6.
[27] See **Viññāṇa,** SD 17.8a.

The aggregate characteristics formula[28]

12 (1) Now, what do you think, bhikshus, is **form** permanent or impermanent?”
“Impermanent, bhante.”
  “Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory [painful] or satisfactory [pleasurable]?”[29]
  “Unsatisfactory, bhante.”
    “Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus:
    ‘This is mine, this I am, this is my self.’?”[30]
      “No, bhante.” [Mv 1.6.42]
13 (2) “Now, what do you think, bhikshus, is **feeling** permanent or impermanent?”
“Impermanent, bhante.”
  “Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?”
  “Unsatisfactory, bhante.”
    “Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus:
    ‘This is mine, this I am, this is my self.’?”
      “No, bhante.”
14 (3) “Now, what do you think, bhikshus, is **perception** permanent or impermanent?”
“Impermanent, bhante.”
  “Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?”
  “Unsatisfactory, bhante.”
    “Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus:
    ‘This is mine, this I am, this is my self.’?”
      “No, bhante.”
15 (4) “Now, what do you think, bhikshus, are **formations** permanent or impermanent?”
“Impermanent, bhante.”
  “Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?”
  “Unsatisfactory, bhante.”
    “Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus:
    ‘This is mine, this I am, this is my self.’?”
      “No, bhante.”
16 (5) “Now, what do you think, bhikshus, is **consciousness** permanent or impermanent?”
“Impermanent, bhante.”
  “Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or satisfactory?” **[68]**
  “Unsatisfactory, bhante.”
    “Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and subject to change fit to be regarded thus:

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[28] A shorter version of this and foll sections are given as **Arahatā S 1** (S 22.76/3:82 f @ SD 26.7) = **Arahatā S 2** (S 22.77/3:84, without verse).

[29] *Dukkhaṁ vā sukhaṁ vā.* Here, the alternative tr, “painful,” reminds us that whatever brings us pain or discomfort (bodily or mentally) is not liked by us. When the pain is gone, we feel some pleassure. However, even the pleasurable is impermanent, and when it is gone, we feel pain. Hence, both the painful and the pleasant are “suffering” (*dukkha*). It is useful to understand this difference between pain and suffering. Simply put, <u>pain is natural</u> (we have a physical but conscious body, so we feel pain, whether tolerable or intolerable, which is a sign of irritability or sensitivity of our experiences); <u>suffering is optional</u> (we can train our minds not to be attached to what is pleasant or to reject what is unpleasant, and to regard even the neutral as being impermanent, changing, becoming otherwise.

[30] *Etam mama, eso’ham asmi, eso me attâti.* These are “**the 3 graspings**” (*ti,vidha gāha*), ie, of view (*diṭṭhi*), of craving (*taṇhā*), of conceit (*māna*) (MA 2:111, 225). The notion “This is mine” arises through <u>craving</u>; the notion “This I am” arises through <u>conceit</u>; the notion “This is my self” arises through <u>views</u>. These 3 considerations represent respectively the 3 kinds of <u>mental proliferation</u> (*papañca*) of self-view (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*), of craving (*taṇhā*), and of conceit (*māna*) (Nm 280; Vbh 393; Nett 37 f). The opposite formula, *n’etaṁ mama, n’eso ‘ham asmi, na mêso attā ti,* is applied below to <u>the 5 aggregates</u> [§§17-21]. See Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind,* 1995:32 f. For detailed studies, see **I: The nature of identity,** SD 19.1; **Me: The nature of conceit,** SD 19.2a; **Mine: The nature of craving,** SD 19.3.

'This is mine, this I am, this is my self.'?"
        "No, bhante." [Mv 1.6.43]

The non-self totality formula[31]

17 (1) "Therefore, bhikshus, any kind of **form** whatsoever,
        whether past, future or present,
            internal or external,
                gross or subtle,
                    inferior or superior,
                        far or near[32]—
all <u>forms</u> should be seen as they really are with right wisdom, thus:
'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.'[33][Mv 1.6.44]

18 (2) Therefore, bhikshus, any kind of **feeling** whatsoever—*whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near*—all <u>feelings</u> should be seen as they really are with right wisdom, thus:
'*This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.*'

19 (3) Therefore, bhikshus, any kind of **perception** whatsoever—*whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near*—all perceptions should be seen as they really are with right wisdom, thus:
'*This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.*'

20 (4) Therefore, bhikshus, any kind of **formations** whatsoever—*whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near*—all formations should be seen as they really are with right wisdom, thus:
'*This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.*'

21 (5) Therefore, bhikshus, any kind of **consciousness** whatsoever—*whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near*—all consciousness should be seen as they really are with right wisdom, thus:
'*This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.*' [Mv 1.6.45]

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[31] This whole section is mutatis mutandis at **Cūḷa Saccaka S** (M 35.24b/1:234 f) = SD 26.5. These are the characteristics of <u>a learner</u> (*sekha*). The arhat, on the other hand, not only has the right view of non-self, but has also abandoned all clinging, as the Buddha explains in the foll §22. The "specific non-self formula" is the line, "This is not mine, this I am not, this is not the self." The combined "aggregate characteristics formula" [§12-16] and the "non-self *totality* formula" [§17-21] is called the *general* non-self formula."

[32] *Atītânagata,paccupannaṁ ajjhattaṁ vā bahiddhā vā oḷarikaṁ vā sukhumaṁ vā hīnaṁ vā panītaṁ vā yaṁ dūre santike vā.* See **(Dve) Khandha S** (S 22.48/3:47) + SD 17.1a (3.2). This classification of the aggregates (by way of the totality formula) is expl in detail in the Vibhaṅga and briefly in the Visuddhimagga: "**internal**" (*ajjhatta*) = physical sense-organs; "**external**" (*bahiddhā*) = physical sense-objects; "**gross**"(*oḷārika*) = that which impinges (physical internal and external senses, with touch = earth, wind, fire); "**subtle**"(*sukhuma*) = that which does not impinge (mind, mind-objects, mind-consciousness, and water); "**inferior**" (*hīna*) = unpleasant and unacceptable sense-experiences [sense-world existence]; "**superior**" (*paṇīta*) = pleasant and acceptable sense-experiences [form & formless existences]; "**far**" (*dūre*) = subtle objects ("difficult to penetrate"); "**near**" (*santike*) = gross objects ("easy to penetrate") (Vbh 1-13; Vism 14.73/450 f; Abhs 6.7). "Whether or not the details of the Vibhaṅga exposition are accepted as valid for the *nikāyas*, it seems clear that this formula is intended to indicate how each *khandha* is to be seen as a class of states, manifold in nature and displaying a considerable variety and also a certain hierarchy" (Gethin 1986: 41).

[33] *N'etaṁ mama, n'eso 'ham asmi, na mêso attā ti.* A brief version, "There can be no considering that (element) as 'I' or 'mine' or 'I am'" (*ahan ti vā maman ti vā asmī ti vā*) is found in **Mahā Hatthi,padôpama S** (M 28/1:184-191 §§6b-7, 11b-12, 16b-17, 21b-22). This is opp of "the 3 graspings" (*ti,vidha gāha*) formula: *etam mama, eso'ham asmi, eso me attâ ti* [§§12-16]. In **Anatta Lakkhaṇa S** (S 22.59,12-16/3:68), this formula is applied to the 5 aggregates & in **Pārileyya S** (S 22.81/3:94-99), SD 6.1, to the 4 primary elements. See also **(Dhātu) Rāhula S** (A 4.177/-2:164 f). See **Pārileyya S,** SD 6.1 (5). See Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind,* 1995a:32 f.

Revulsion

22 Seeing thus, bhikshus, the learned noble disciple is revulsed [disenchanted][34] with <u>form</u>, is revulsed with <u>feeling</u>, is revulsed with <u>perception</u>, is revulsed with <u>formations</u>, is revulsed with <u>consciousness</u>.

Liberation: The arhat's review knowledge

22.2   Through revulsion,   he becomes dispassionate.
           Through dispassion,   his mind is freed.
           When it is freed,   there arises the knowledge: 'Freed!'[35]
      He understands:
        'Destroyed is birth.
          The holy life has been lived.
             What needs to be done has been done.
                There is no more of this state of being.'" [Mv 1.6.46]

Arhathood of the 5 monks[36]

23 The Blessed One said this. The company of 5 monks joyfully approved of the Blessed One's word.

24 And while this discourse was being spoken,[37] the minds of <u>the company of 5 monks</u> were, through non-clinging, freed from the influxes.[38]

[**25** At that time, there were 6 arhats in the world.][39] [Mv 1.6.47]

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[34] On <u>revulsion</u>, see *Nibbidā,* SD 20.1.

[35] *Vimuttismiṁ vimuttam iti ñāṇaṁ hoti,* or "When freed, there is the knowledge, it (the mind) is freed." Note that the self is not addressed here.

[36] Comy says that the elder Koṇḍañña attained streamwinning on the Āsāḷha full-moon day; on the 1st day (after the full moon) Bhaddiya; on the 2nd day Vappa; on the 3rd day Mahānāma, and on the 5th day Assaji. All the 5 attained arhathood at the end of the teaching of the Anatta Lakkhaṇa Sutta (*Iti thero āsāḷhi,puṇṇamāyaṁ sotāpatti,phale patiṭṭhito, pāṭipada,divase bhaddiya-t,thero, dutiya,pakkha,divase vappa-t,thero, tatiya,pakkha,divase mahānāma-t,thero, pakkhassa catutthiyaṁ assaji-t,thero sotāpatti,phale patiṭṭhito. Pañcamiyā pana pakkhassa anatta,lakkhaṇa,suttanta,desanā,pariyosāne sabbe pi arahatte patiṭṭhitā,* AA 1:147).

[37] On the nature of listening as the basis for arhathood, see **Assaji S** (S 22.88) @ SD 42.8 (2.3.3).

[38] "Influxes," *āsava*. The term comes from *ā-savati* "flows towards" (ie either "into" or "out" towards the observer). It has been variously tr as taints ("deadly taints," RD), corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, evil (influence), or simply left untr. The Abhidhamma lists 4 *āsava*: the influx of (1) sense-desire (*kām' āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhav'āsava*), (3) views (*diṭṭh'āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijjâsava*) (D 16.2.4, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These 4 are also known as "floods" (*ogha*) and "yokes" (*yoga*). The list of 3 influxes (omitting the influx of views) is prob older and is found more frequently in the Suttas: **Saṅgīti S** (D 33,-1.10(20)/3:216); **Sammā,diṭṭhi S** (M 9.70/1:55), SD 11.14; **Āsava S** (S 38.8/4:256); **(Te,vijja) Jāṇussoṇi S** (A 3.59.4/1:167); **Nibbedhika Pariyāya S** (A 6.63/3:410), SD 6.11. The destruction of these influxes is equivalent to arhathood. See BDict under *āsava*.

[39] This parenthesis is only in Mv 1.6.47 (V 1:14,36).

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